



Client Information Sheet

HEART DISEASE

Heart disease is a condition which affects a number of animals as they get older. Normally the heart acts as a pump to move blood around the body. Heart disease occurs when the heart struggles to move blood around the body due to a defect or disease. When blood is not circulating properly many other organs can be affected such as kidney, liver, brain and muscles. In most dogs heart disease is caused by either a valve problem known as mitral valve disease or endocardiosis, or a heart muscle disease known as a cardiomyopathy.

Mitral Valve disease

The heart consists of 4 different chambers-the left and right upper parts (atrium) and the left and right lower parts (ventricles). On the left and right sides the upper and lower parts are separated by small valves (overlapping flaps) called mitral valves. These valves help to push the blood through the heart and around the body. In mitral valve disease the valves (or flaps) fail to close completely to move the blood forward through the heart and this lets some blood move backwards. When blood flows backwards it can be heard by your vet and is described as a “murmur.” Hearing this can often be the first sign that your animal has a heart problem. This condition usually occurs in small-medium breeds of dogs and tends to begin about midlife progressing slowly.

Cardiomyopathy

This is a disease which affects the heart muscle and prevents it from expanding and contracting normally. There are a few different types of cardiomyopathies which we will not expand on here but essentially cause the same problems. Cardiomyopathies generally affect larger breed dogs, particularly boxers.

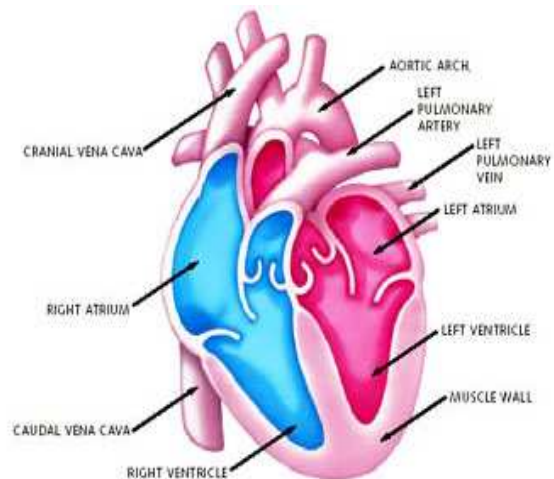
Symptoms

Initially you may not see any obvious signs but your vet may be able to hear a murmur. As the condition progresses symptoms you may notice include:

- Coughing
 - Breathing difficulties
 - Tiredness/fatigue
 - Reduced exercise tolerance
 - Weight loss
 - Sudden loss of consciousness/fainting
 - Swollen belly/Abdomen (water retention)
 - Lack of appetite
 - Breathlessness/heavy panting
- Often symptoms are worse after exercise or excitement. Gradually these symptoms will worsen as the condition progresses

Diagnosing

Often heart disease is detected by the presence of a murmur with or without associated clinical signs. Other tests which may be performed on your animal include Xrays, Blood tests, ECG or ultrasound if we need to determine further what type of heart problem your animal has.



Treatment

Unfortunately there is no “cure” for heart disease. There are a number of modern drugs which can be used to slow the progression of the disease and reduce the symptoms your animal is showing. These drugs help to reduce the workload and pressure on the heart and help the heart pump more efficiently. These include vetmedin, fortekor and prilium as the main heart drugs. Depending on your animal your veterinarian will discuss which best suits your pet. These are all lifelong medications and must be given daily. Sometimes another drug is prescribed as well called lasix, this is to reduce the fluid retention within the body. Other drugs can be added depending on the degree of heart problem and your animals specific needs. With heart disease you will need regular checks by your veterinarian and medications may need to be adjusted or changed depending on your animals progress.

Another thing to consider in dogs with heart conditions are changing the diet as low salt (sodium) diets. The reason behind this is sodium is normally removed by the kidneys but this is not able to happen effectively with heart failure meaning more stays in the body. Hills make a special food h/d aimed at dogs with heart disease or even k/d which is a kidney diet but also low in salt. If your dog will not eat commercial foods talk to your vet about other low salt diets.

Summary

Whilst there is no cure for heart failure in animals there are a number of things you can do to make your animal more comfortable and extend their quality and length of life. Your vet will work with you to achieve this but you will need to make sure you get regular check ups and contact your vet with any concerns.